

At last: our No. 2 general's own account of . . .

The day the Germans gave up

by GEN. WALTER BEDELL SMITH



VICTORY YELLS: GI's in Europe celebrate news of Nazi surrender.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Today marks the 10th anniversary of the proclamation of victory in Europe in World War II. The surrender had been signed shortly before. On that historic occasion, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, was represented by his Chief of Staff, Lieut. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith. Here is General Smith's own account of events leading to the surrender and of the surrender itself.

By spring, 1945, the German forces had been shattered. So desperate was the enemy that men considered "politically unreliable" by the Hitler government were pressed into service.

One such "unreliable" was the Grand Duke of Hesse, who later told me this story:

The Grand Duke was drafted into a bicycle battalion of a *Volkssturm* division, one of those units hastily assembled and consisting of men previously considered unfit for service. He was sent forward with his unit, which first encountered Allied troops in the form of an American armored division. The battalion disintegrated and the Grand Duke, having punctured both tires of his bicycle and torn his trousers, tried forlornly to make his way home on foot.

About this time the advance guard of the next division of the American Armored Corps came down the road. Commanding the leading tank was a tough sergeant. As the tank pulled alongside the bedraggled Grand Duke, the sergeant reached out, picked up the young German and asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm the Grand Duke of Hesse," he replied.

The sergeant glanced at the torn trousers and said laconically, "For a grand duke, you're in a helluva fix."

That sergeant's appraisal of the Grand Duke applied to the enemy forces generally when, in the first week of May, 10 years ago, a representative of the German high command, Gen. Admiral Hans Georg Friedeburg, first communicated with us.

He was under instructions to arrange a cease-fire and wanted to avoid a direct surrender to the Russians. Obviously, the Russians knew this and suspected that we might accept such a proposal. For some time Russian mobile radio units had been broadcasting to the German troops, saying that the latter were being asked to join the Western Allies in a march against Soviet forces.

In any event, we knew that Admiral Friedeburg

would bargain as long and as hard as he could; so we decided to use a little deception. We prepared a map which we planned to show the Admiral. The map indicated our troop positions, but it also showed some powerful "mythical" forces which seemed poised to cut the remnants of the German Army right in two.

General Eisenhower had decided not to see the Germans until they had surrendered, so Admiral Friedeburg was referred to me at our headquarters in Reims, France. His expression was haggard, but his manner was very correct, not arrogant, but not cringing—what you would expect of an officer of an army which was defeated, but would not admit it.

He started to say that he was not authorized to negotiate a surrender, that he would have to go to higher German authorities.

"Obviously, you are not familiar with the situation," I said. "You are out of touch. I know as well as you that it is impossible for you to continue fighting."

Casually, I reached into my desk and drew out the map—the one containing our "mythical" forces. I told him that, of course, I was under no obligation to show him the map. However, if he wanted to look at it, there it was.

He picked it up, looked at it—and suddenly tears rolled down his face. After he regained his composure, he asked if he might send a message to one of his superiors, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, requesting permission to continue negotiations.

The following day, Col. Gen. Gustav Jodl, chief of staff of the German Army, arrived. He and Admiral Friedeburg came to my office a day later (May 6) knowing that the jig was up. General Jodl again

pressed for a cease-fire to Western Allied troops only, which of course we would not accept.

Finally, Jodl said, "If you will not agree to a surrender to Allied troops only, we will simply walk into your lines and surrender."

I communicated this to General Eisenhower, who set a deadline. He said if the Germans did not surrender within a specified number of hours, we would close the lines and fire at German troops approaching, even if they were not armed.

When I relayed this information to Jodl, he sent a message to his headquarters requesting Marshal Keitel's permission to surrender. He received permission several hours later.

It was then past midnight, May 7 (French time). Representatives of the Allied forces convened shortly after 2 a.m. in the map room of our headquarters. Then we sent for the German representatives. They came in and saluted, and we placed before them documents of unconditional surrender.

The Germans signed. I signed for the Allied commander in chief and the Russian and French representatives signed as witnesses.

I then spoke for the first time during the ceremonies: "The German representatives will now withdraw." General Jodl asked to make a statement. I said, "Proceed." He declared that the destiny of the German people was now in the hands of the Allies.

Ike's Final Warning

When he finished, I said again, "The German representatives will now withdraw." They saluted and left. General Eisenhower, who had been in another room all along, then asked me to bring in Jodl.

General Eisenhower asked Jodl, "Do you understand this document and what it means?"

"Yes," Jodl replied.

"You understand, then, that I hold you responsible for carrying out this document to the letter."

"Yes," said General Jodl. He saluted and left. After that, there was, as you can imagine, a good deal of celebration. Everybody was congratulating everybody else and shaking hands.

Just before we signed the surrender documents, I felt I was becoming ill. I had acquired an ulcer, which was beginning to act up—most unpleasantly.

As soon as General Jodl had left, I went outside and was quietly sick.

THE AUTHOR:

Since his notable career in World War II, Gen. Walter Bedell Smith has served as Ambassador to Russia, Director of Central Intelligence and Under Secretary of State. Last year, he was elected vice-chairman of the American Machine and Foundry Co. in New York.

